

Otago Regional Council Compliance Plan 2026–2029

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1.0	July 2026	James Adams Senior Policy Analyst RPS, Air & Coast, Policy and Planning

CONTRIBUTORS	DESCRIPTION	APPROVED BY
Melanie Heather Principal Compliance Specialist, Compliance Kerstin Strauss Team Leader RPS, Air & Coast, Policy and Planning Simon Wilson Manager, Compliance	Final for Council approval	Otago Regional Council

Cover image: Staff at Silver Stream, Gordon Road



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About the compliance plan

The Otago Regional Council (ORC) regulates activities that affect water, air, land, and the coastal environment to achieve sustainable environmental outcomes.

Demand on ORC’s compliance function is increasing due to growth and intensification of land use, a rising number of resource consents, and higher community expectations.

In this context, compliance effort must focus on the areas of greatest risk to the environment and what matters most to the community.

This Compliance Plan sets out how ORC will prioritise and deliver its compliance functions from July 2026 to June 2029.

The compliance priorities draw on statutory obligations, Council direction, and known risks.

They guide both proactive monitoring and incident response, ensuring effort is directed to activities with the greatest potential for adverse effects or non-compliance.

This plan:

- sets objectives to define success,
- identifies compliance priorities, based on risk,
- provides a Council-endorsed basis for allocating compliance resources.

It is a strategic framework rather than an operational work programme. Detailed work planning, resourcing, and procedures are set through internal team plans and standard operating processes.



Figure 1: The Compliance Plan’s regulatory and organisational context.

Objectives

The Compliance Plan objectives are to:

- Identify and prioritise the activities that ORC's Compliance team will focus its resources on.
- Ensure compliance with rules and consent conditions.
- Proactively communicate with communities and consent holders about ORC's Compliance team activities, encourage good practice, and raise environmental awareness.

By focusing compliance effort where the risk is greatest, this Plan supports ORC's work towards achieving community outcomes, environmental outcomes, and giving effect to the RMA.

This plan sets the direction for ORC's compliance work over the next three years.

It explains what we will focus on to deliver good compliance and environmental outcomes. It does not list every activity we will undertake.

Our work programmes are updated regularly so we can respond to new issues, emerging risks, and changes in national direction.

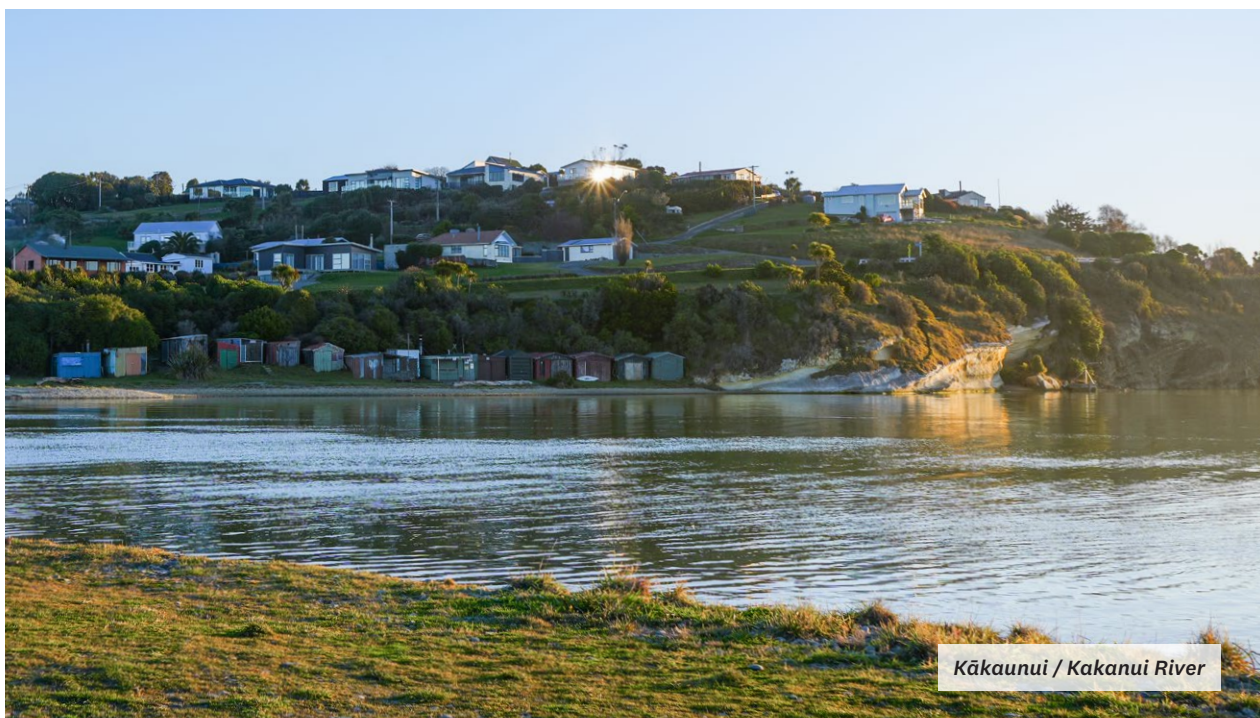
Monitoring these objectives

ORC measures the success of this plan by drawing on:

- feedback from compliance staff, key partners, and close stakeholders,
- progress against programmed workplans.

Around the mid-point of the Plan, ORC will perform a desktop assessment to:

- ensure the priorities are still aligned with risk and Council direction,
- identify any emerging gaps or unintended consequences,
- inform future iterations of the Compliance Plan and related work programmes.



Kākaunui / Kakanui River

Compliance priorities in Otago

How ORC establishes its compliance priorities

Identifying priorities for compliance monitoring enables ORC to plan its work to focus on the issues with the highest environmental and community impacts. For incident response, these priorities help determine the level and type of response.

The Compliance Priorities in Otago are based on the level of risk an activity poses to people and the environment.

In accordance with the Regional Sector Strategic Compliance Framework, this risk assessment considers how likely non-compliance is and the potential impact if it occurs (including cultural, social, and economic effects).

Activities are grouped into priorities, as shown in **Appendix 1**, with Priority 1 representing the highest risk. These priorities guide how often and how closely activities are monitored.



The priorities

For 2026–2029, the compliance teams will focus on:

Priority 1: Improving freshwater quality by reducing non-compliant discharges

Poorly managed discharges directly affect the quality of our region's rivers, lakes, and underlying groundwater aquifers.

As national direction and regional regulations regarding water management continue to evolve, ORC's primary compliance focus is the active monitoring and enforcement of discharge rules.

We provide guidance to support good environmental practice and use regulatory tools to ensure consent holders and landowners meet their compliance obligations.

Priority 2: Safeguarding regional natural resources through proactive and integrated monitoring of large-scale activities

"Large-scale activities" involve multiple inter-related consents (e.g. earthworks, water takes, discharges, and structures) or occur at a scale that concentrates potential effects in one location (such as large quarries or major industrial plants).

We use an integrated approach, monitoring the full suite of consents and potential effects together, to ensure regulatory efficiency.

For these activities, the Compliance team actively manages monitoring of consents, reviews data, and works proactively with consent holders to achieve compliance.

Priority 3: Protecting water quantity by monitoring water takes and use

Maintaining river flows, lake levels and aquifer levels is critical for the health of Otago's waterbodies.

To protect these values, we actively monitor water takes and audit water meter data. We also work proactively with consent holders to protect freshwater values by maintaining flows and adhering to allocation limits.

Priority 4: Protecting freshwater habitats, hydrological function, and aquifer security by monitoring structures and works in and adjacent to fresh water

Monitoring structures in and adjacent to fresh water, including wetlands, is an important regional priority.

Poorly designed works, including non-compliant bore construction and operation, culverts, and wetland modifications, can severely impact the habitats of freshwater species, disrupt hydrological function, and, in the case of non-compliant bore construction, create pathways for groundwater contamination.

Priority 5: Improving air quality by reducing non-compliant air discharges

Non-compliant domestic air discharges from inefficient domestic burning during winter months can affect human health. Non-compliant industrial and rural air discharges, such as outdoor burning, that breach permitted activity rules or consent conditions also have localised impacts on air quality.

Air quality is a significant work programme for Council, but many air quality issues are currently more effectively managed through incident response, education, and other programmes than through routine proactive monitoring.

The priority given to air discharges in this Plan reflects where compliance activity can most effectively influence outcomes under the existing regulatory framework.

Priority 6: Protecting coastal habitats and water quality by monitoring coastal structures and discharges

Non-compliant structures and discharges in the coastal environment can affect coastal water quality, damage marine habitats, and reduce public amenity.

Applying priorities in practice

The priority of an activity in this Plan provides a starting point. In practice, the level of attention given to a specific activity or incident will depend on the situation.

When planning monitoring, or responding to and investigating incidents, we consider risk factors such as:

- the actual or potential impact on people and the environment
- compliance history, and the scale and nature of the activity
- community and mana whenua concerns
- the sensitivity of the receiving environment, and
- opportunities to support behaviour change.

This means that some lower priority activities will receive a higher level of attention at times where the risk is greater.

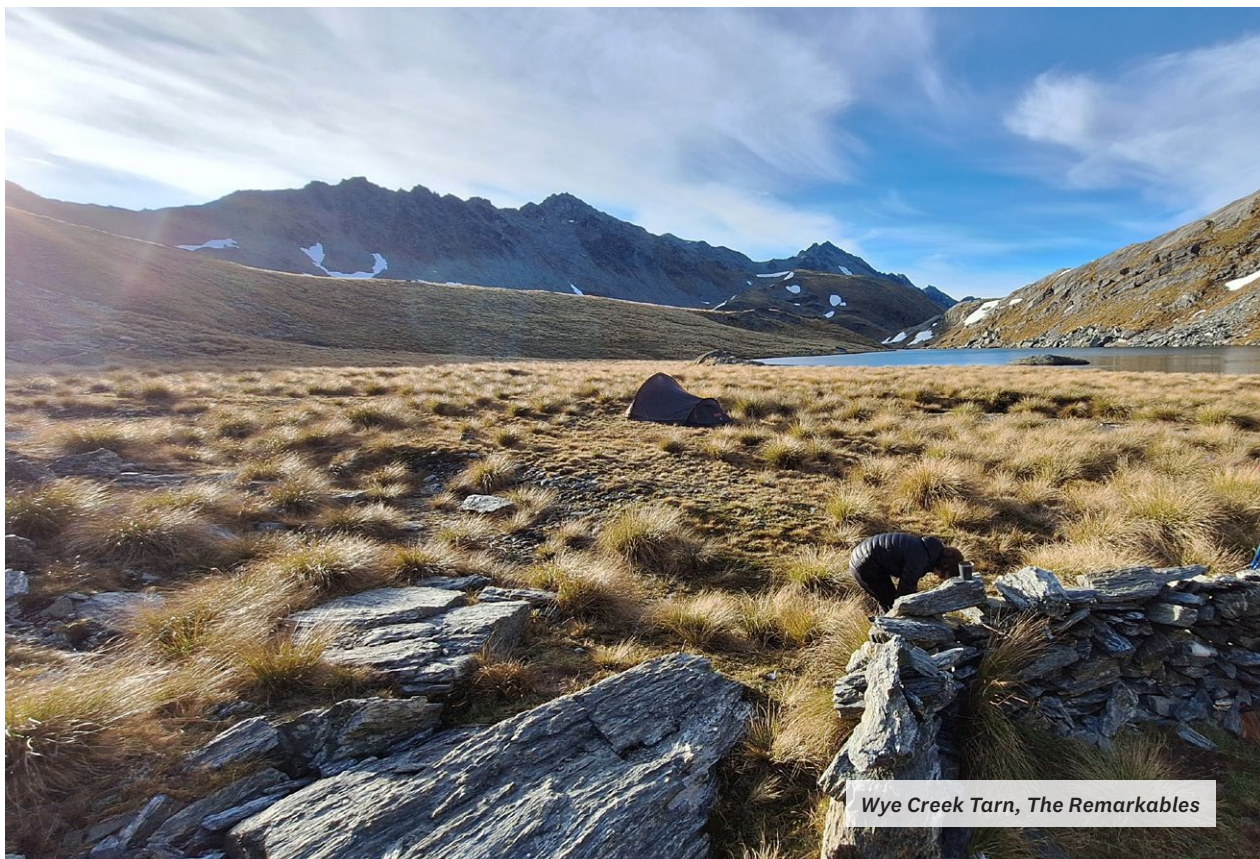
For example, most coastal discharges are generally low risk and require less frequent monitoring. However, higher-risk coastal discharges, such as industrial discharges or contaminated stormwater, are monitored more closely.

A risk-based approach allows the Compliance team to focus our effort where it will have the greatest impact. This includes targeting areas where the risk is higher or where compliance is less likely.

Local knowledge and professional judgement are important. Risks vary across Otago and change over time, so we adapt our approach based on monitoring data and what we are seeing on the ground.

Otago's environmental pressures are geographically diverse, and compliance issues differ between coastal and inland communities.

To ensure our approach fits the needs of the moment, officers continuously adapt their monitoring strategies using data, incident trends, professional judgement, and state of the environment reporting to respond to evolving risks.



Wye Creek Tarn, The Remarkables

What ORC's Compliance team does

ORC's Compliance team monitors permitted activities and consent conditions and responds to and investigates incidents.

Monitoring activities

ORC monitors activities to check they are meeting resource consent conditions and permitted activity rules.

The Compliance Priorities in Otago provide a framework for structuring monitoring work across the team, ensuring that work is carried out efficiently and focused on the right activities.

The team receives and analyses environmental monitoring data, carries out site visits, and uses tools such as aerial monitoring to assess compliance.

Incident response

We respond to reports of environmental non-compliance and pollution incidents received through our 24-hour Pollution Hotline, website, and email, as well as field reports from staff.

In addition to responding to reported incidents, the team also undertakes proactive monitoring of activities operating under permitted activity rules.

All incidents and compliance matters are logged, assessed, and responded to. The priorities in this Plan help determine the allocation of resources and urgency of the response.

ORC uses a risk-based approach to decide how we respond. This determines how quickly we act and what type of response is needed, for example whether:

- a site visit is required, and how quickly,
- a response is needed after hours; or,
- further monitoring, education, or enforcement action is appropriate.

All incidents are responded to and reported.

Specialist response capability

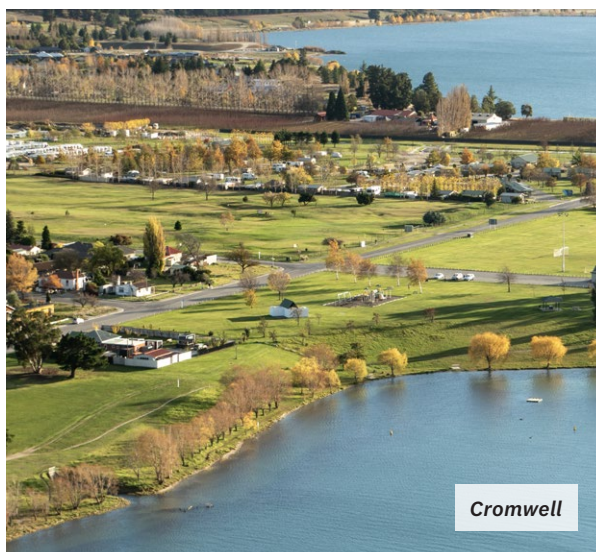
We also maintain the capability to respond to coastal oil spills under the Maritime Transport Act.

This function is managed through operational plans.

Working in partnership with Kāi Tahu

ORC recognises the value that engagement with mana whenua adds through the sharing of their knowledge and wisdom.

Council works with Kāi Tahu as mana whenua in Otago and is committed to developing a trusted and enduring relationship, and to enable the development of mana whenua capacity to contribute to decision making, reflecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and Kāi Tahu tikaka and mātauraka in our work.



Cromwell

Compliance approach

The compliance team applies a proactive, responsive, and risk-based approach to our regulatory functions.

Our philosophy is **education first**. We will work proactively with groups, resource users, and consent holders on good environmental practice. We are guided by the Regional Sector Strategic Compliance Framework 2019–24 operating principles:¹

Transparent

We provide clear information about compliance requirements, providing good information on environmental performance, and our actions to address non-compliance.

Responsive

We will respond in an effective and timely manner in accordance with legislative and organisational obligations.

Consistent

Our actions are consistent with legislation and within our powers. We will strive for consistency of compliance and enforcement outcomes.

Targeted

We focus on the most important issues to achieve the best outcomes, targeting regulatory intervention at activities that pose the greatest risk to the environment.

Collaborative

We collaborate and share information with other regulators and stakeholders. We will engage with consent holders and communities to achieve good environmental outcomes.

Evidence-based

Our decisions will be informed by a range of sources, including science, other regulators, the community, industry, and interest groups.

Lawful, accountable

We conduct ourselves lawfully and impartially in accordance with relevant policies and guidance. We will measure and report on our performance.

Fair and reasonable

Our decisions are appropriate to the circumstances, and our actions will be proportionate to the risks to the environment, people, and the seriousness of the incident.

¹ This framework is in the process of being updated at time of writing. The drafters advise that these principles are likely to remain the same.

How we respond to non-compliance

ORC uses the model set out in the Regional Sector Strategic Compliance Framework to inform the approach and the regulatory tools we use to address non-compliance:

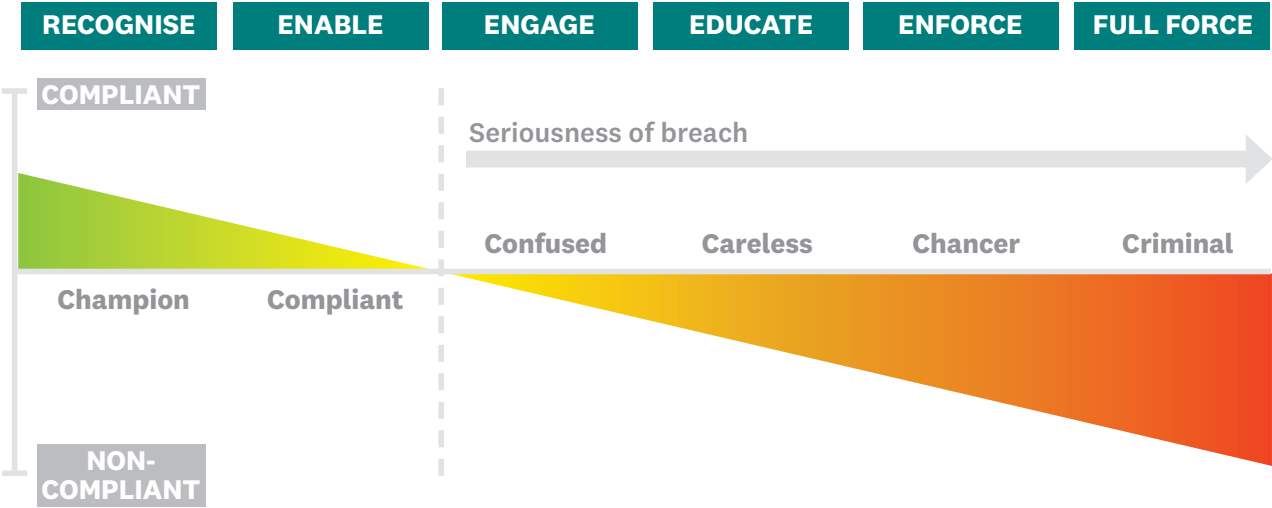


Figure 2: Influencing behaviour change — based on the Regional Sector Strategic Compliance Framework Mark II Model



Compliance tools

We use a range of compliance and enforcement tools to respond to non-compliant resource consents and incidents which breach our plans or national regulations:

Letters	Used where a minor breach has been reported and/or to educate on the relevant consent conditions, rules and regulations that apply.
Formal warnings	Used when the risk to the environment or people from a breach is low and to work proactively to improve compliance to avoid repeat incidents.
Infringement notices	Used when non-compliance with a consent condition or with rules requires a more formal approach and where a fee is required to be paid.
Abatement notices	Used when non-compliance with a consent condition or rules requires works to cease and/or where remediation is required.
Enforcement orders	Used for higher level offending, made by the Environment Court, and requires activities to cease, actions to be taken and/or costs to be paid.
Prosecutions	For higher level offending, establish the guilt or innocence of an accused party, and can include fines and/or imprisonment.

Programmes to support compliance

To support our compliance priorities, we work proactively with landowners and consent holders. We **engage** with them on compliance matters, **enable** compliance wherever possible, and **educate** on good environmental practices.

We achieve this through:

ORC website

We provide clear guidance on good practice across sectors, including farming, earthworks, bores, water takes, and data reporting. We are also improving how people can submit information to us.

On-site advice

We provide practical, on-site advice across rural and urban settings to support good practice and help people meet plan rules and national regulations.

Compliance correspondence

We keep consent holders informed about the results of monitoring and how they can improve compliance.

This includes both resource consents and permitted activities, such as dairy farming and forestry.

Industry workshops

We work with other ORC teams and industry groups to run practical field days and sector specific workshops (such as earthworks workshops and farm days) to share good practice and discuss how to apply rules.

Proactive compliance

We monitor permitted activities and work with consent holders early to address issues before they become non-compliant.

This includes programmes such as dairy farm monitoring, forestry harvest planning, and low flow management.

Partnerships

We work with industry groups to promote good practice and support compliance.

Guidance material

We publish technical guidance, fact sheets and other resources that explain requirements and show how to apply them in practice.

Proactive communication

We use ORC channels, and targeted communications to explain our compliance priorities, provide seasonal guidance (such as low flows and winter air quality), and keep communities informed about issues that may affect them.

Compliance at a glance: financial year 2024 to 2025



8000 consents in our system



549 activities and structures in/over waterbodies



1,656 water takes



296 air discharge consents



682 consents for structures in the coast



1,879 discharges to land, water, and coast



162 earthworks consents



472 dairy farms monitored



899 consents monitored on-site & 3170 desktop audits



39 Forestry inspections



1045 incidents responded to



400 registered dams



377 significant non-compliant site² and desktop inspections



587 moderate non-compliant site² and desktop inspections



2807 low risk non-compliant site² and desktop inspections



5198 fully compliant site² and desktop inspections

² This site inspection number does not include dairy or forestry inspections (permitted activities)

Appendix 1: Priorities with example activities

The activities listed under each priority are examples of where we will focus our effort. They are not exhaustive or exclusive lists. We may include other activities with similar risks and adjust priorities for particular activities as circumstances change.

Priority 1: Improving freshwater quality by reducing non-compliant discharges

Examples of actions and outputs under this priority:



Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Sedimentation of freshwater from earthworks and in-river works Issue: Poorly managed earthworks, and in-river works can discharge sediment and affect water quality.		
Educate and advocate good erosion and sediment control practices. Monitor earthworks and in-river works.	• Work closely with district councils and industry to promote effective erosion and sediment control practices. • Educate and promote good practice for in-river works. • Monitor compliance with consents for earthworks and in-river works. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	• Compliance with earthworks rules and resource consents. • Sedimentation of freshwater and estuaries is reduced.
Plantation forestry Issue: Poorly managed forestry activities discharge sediment, disturb river habitats, and affect water quality.		
Educate and advocate good forestry practices to reduce sediment discharges and monitor forestry activities.	• Educate and promote good practice for afforestation, harvesting and earthworks. • Monitor consents and permitted activity plantation forestry. • For higher risk activities, undertake pre-harvest inspections, monitoring during harvesting and post-harvest inspections where appropriate. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions or the NES are identified.	• Compliance with NES rules. • Impacts of plantation forestry activities on freshwater are reduced.

Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Stock exclusion Issue: Stock access to freshwater degrades water quality of rivers, lakes, and wetlands.		
Educate farmers on stock exclusion requirements and monitor stock access.	- Where appropriate, apply a proactive education first approach to enabling compliance with current regional rules and regulations for stock access and further education as the regulatory framework changes. - Monitor stock interactions with rivers, lakes, and wetlands. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES, or plan rules are identified.	- Farmers understand current and upcoming requirements. - Where required, stock is excluded from freshwater bodies. - Negative impacts on water quality are reduced.
Dairy inspections Issue: The effects of non-compliant farm effluent discharges is a contributor to water quality degradation.		
Monitor farm waste management (the storage and discharge of solids and liquids generated by farming activities).	- When appropriate, apply a proactive education first approach to enabling compliance with regional rules for farm effluent discharges. - On-site monitoring of collected animal waste discharges and infrastructure based on risk with high-risk farms inspected annually. - Appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	- Farmers understand current and upcoming requirements. - Improved compliance with rules and consents conditions. - Negative impacts on water quality are reduced.



Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Intensive farming Issue: Poorly managed intensive farming can cause water quality degradation.		
Monitor intensive farming practices and educate farmers on the requirements.	- Where appropriate, apply a proactive education first approach to enabling compliance with regional and national rules and regulations for intensive farming – dairy farms, intensive grazing, feedlots and stockholding, agricultural intensification, synthetic nitrogen use. - Undertake desktop, and aerial monitoring annually of known at risk catchments. - Site inspections where risks have been observed during flyovers. - Appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions or plan rules are identified.	- Farmers understand current and upcoming requirements. - Farmers comply with the new rules or have obtained consent. Impacts on water quality are reduced.
Municipal wastewater treatment plants Issue: Non-compliant discharges from wastewater treatment plants and reticulated systems can have significant impacts on freshwater and coastal water quality.		
Monitor municipal wastewater treatment discharges.	- Monitor wastewater treatment plants at least annually, based on environmental and health risk and previous records of non-compliance. - Work proactively with district councils to reduce incidents of non-compliance. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, national standards or plan rules are identified.	- Ensure compliance at wastewater treatment plants. - Reduced impacts on freshwater and coastal water quality.



Priority 2: Safeguarding regional natural resources through proactive and integrated monitoring of large-scale activities

Examples of actions and outputs under this priority:

Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
District council consents (excluding wastewater) Issue: District councils hold several large-scale consents, and compliance with these consents is not always achieved, which can impact the receiving environment.		
Monitor all large-scale district council consents and work with councils to improve compliance.	• Work proactively with district councils to reduce incidents of non-compliance. • Monitor large-scale consents at least annually and based on environmental and health risk and previous records of non-compliance. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	• Improved compliance with consent conditions. • Improved collaboration with district councils.
Contaminated land and landfills Issue: Monitoring of contaminated land activities, and active and closed landfills is needed to address risk associated with leachate and odour, and potential discharges to water.		
Monitor contaminated land activities and all landfills.	• Monitor active landfills at least annually. • Monitor closed landfills at least every 3 years, and prioritise monitoring based on level of risk to water, the coastal marine area, land, and community concern. • Monitor disturbance of contaminated land consents based on level of risk. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	• Active landfills are compliant with conditions. • Impacts from closed landfills are identified and effects are addressed.
Other large-scale activities Issue: The scale and nature of these activities in Otago require an integrated approach to monitoring consents.		
Monitor large-scale activities.	• Monitor large-scale activities (such as mining and quarrying activities, larger private wastewater schemes, large-scale industrial and processing activities, meat works and rendering plants, and large power generation schemes) based on the history of compliance, environmental risk, and monitoring data. • Where non-compliance with consent conditions is identified, take appropriate regulatory action and work proactively with consent holders to improve compliance and performance.	• Consent holders are compliant with conditions of their consents. • Risks to the receiving environment from non-compliance are reduced.

Priority 3: Protecting water quantity by monitoring water takes and use

Examples of actions and outputs under this priority:

Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Water takes Issue: Taking more water than is consented is unlawful and can adversely affect mauri, freshwater habitats, and other water users.		
Monitor water takes.	- Undertake desktop or on-site monitoring of water permits based on catchment risk (e.g. Upper Taieri, Manuherikia, Cardrona, Pisa, Gibbston and Central Otago). - Work proactively with water users to reduce incidents of non-compliance. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, plan rules or water measuring regulations are identified.	- Improved compliance with rules and consents conditions. - Impacts on freshwater and habitats are reduced. - The reliability and accuracy of water use data provided by consent holders is improved.
Water flows and levels during dry periods Issue: During dry weather, water takes during low flows have greater impacts on freshwater.		
Ensure minimum flows are maintained during dry weather periods.	- Establish dry weather task force prior to dry weather conditions affecting flows. - Monitor low flow conditions and work proactively with permit holders to ensure minimum flows are maintained during low flow periods. - Issue water shortage directions where required. - Monitor residual flows on permits and prioritise this based on the level of risk. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions or plan rules are identified.	- Compliance with minimum and residual flows is improved. - Environmental impacts from water takes are reduced during low-flow periods.

Priority 4: Protecting freshwater habitats, hydrological function, and aquifer security by monitoring structures and works in and adjacent to fresh water

Examples of actions and outputs under this priority:

Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Instream structures Issue: Structures in rivers can obstruct fish passage and impact habitat, particularly for migratory species.		
Educate and advocate for structures which provide fish passage. Monitor permitted, and consented structures.	- Educate and promote good practice for fish passage for structures in rivers. - Monitor consented structures. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, plan rules or NES are identified.	- People understand the requirements to carry out activities permitted under National Environmental Standards. - People comply with the regulations. - Fish passage in Otago is improved.
Impacts on wetlands Issue: Non-compliant land use, discharges and water takes can impact on the hydrology, functioning and ecological values of Otago's natural wetlands.		
Educate landowners on wetland regulations. Monitor permitted, and consented activities, estuaries, and Regionally Significant Wetlands.	- Educate landowners on regulations for activities in and near natural wetlands. - Monitor consented activities. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, plan rules or the NES are identified.	- People comply with the regulations. - Regionally significant wetlands retain the characteristics and qualities that have determined their significance. - Impacts on natural wetlands and their values are reduced.

Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Dams and other structures Issue: Monitoring of dams and structures is needed to reduce the impacts of non-compliance on freshwater, habitats, and safety.		
Monitor dams and other structures.	• Prioritise the frequency and extent of monitoring of dams and structures in accordance with new NES information requirements. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	• Compliance with rules and NES. • Dam failure risk is reduced and dam impacts on fresh water are reduced.
Bores Issue: Poorly constructed or maintained bores can provide pathways for contaminants to enter groundwater.		
Educate and advocate good practice for bore construction, maintenance, and decommissioning. Monitor bores.	• Monitor compliance with consents. • Work proactively with unconsented bore owners on good practice for bore maintenance and decommissioning. • Update the Bore Register wherever possible. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	• Improved compliance with rules and consents conditions. • Impacts on aquifers is reduced.



Priority 5: Improving air quality by reducing non-compliant air discharges

Examples of actions and outputs under this priority:

Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Domestic burning Issue: Discharges from inefficient domestic burning during the winter months can impact health.		
Educate on efficient domestic burning and monitor domestic air discharges.	- Where appropriate, apply a proactive education first approach regarding correct burning practices – particularly in Air Zone 1 Airsheds. - Take appropriate action where breaches of plan rules and NES are identified. Letters are sent, and inspections are undertaken for any on-going non-compliance.	- Improved compliance with rules and good burning practice. - Particulate matter levels in airsheds are reduced.
Industrial air discharges Issue: Localised effects from non-compliant industrial discharges can impact on health and amenity.		
Monitor industrial air discharge consents in Otago.	- Undertake monitoring of higher risk air discharges at least annually, and lower risk discharges less frequently. - Work proactively with consent holders to improve discharge quality over time. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	- Improved compliance with consents and rules. - Reduced localised impacts from non-compliant discharges.
Rural air discharges Issue: Discharges from rural activities such as outdoor burning can impact on health and amenity.		
Educate on appropriate outdoor burning.	- Prepare educational material regarding rural discharges and work proactively with landowners to improve outdoor burning practice. - Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions, NES or plan rules are identified.	- Improve compliance with rules. - Reduce localised impacts from discharges.

Priority 6: Protecting coastal habitats and water quality by monitoring coastal structures and discharges

Examples of actions and outputs under this priority:

Action	Compliance team outputs	Outcome
Coastal activities and structures Issue: Non-compliant structures and activities in the coastal environment can affect habitats and coastal amenity.		
Undertake monitoring of consented coastal structures.	• Monitor according to the level of risk. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions or plan rules are identified.	• Impacts on the coastal environment are reduced.
Coastal discharges Issue: Non-compliant coastal discharges can affect marine habitats and coastal amenity.		
Monitor consented coastal discharges, focusing on those with higher potential environmental effects.	• Monitor according to the level of risk. • Take appropriate action where breaches of consent conditions or plan rules are identified.	• High-risk coastal discharges are identified and addressed. • Adverse impacts on coastal water quality are reduced.



Karitāne



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